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Soviet underground periodicals tell how it is

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The most startling phenomenon in Soviet underground literature, "samizdat," is the publication of the periodical Chronicle of Current Events. This informative political publication has appeared regularly on the last day of every second month since April, 1968.

At least one copy of every issue has reached the West. In the fall an English translation of at least a dozen issues will be published by Professor Peter Reddaway of the London School of Economics.

The Chronicle has remained strictly factual. If some of its data on illegal arrests, political trials, conditions in labor camps or asylums run by the secret police turn out to be erroneous, The Chronicle publishes corrections. This is something new in the usually impassioned and doctrinaire Russian political literature.

Second work appears

Recently another underground periodical has come out. It is called Exodus and is published by Soviet Zionists.

In format and presentation it is similar to the Chronicle. But whereas the Chronicle carries an extract from the United Nations' Declaration of the Rights of Man, Exodus carries two verses from the 137th Psalm:

• "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept when we remembered Zion."

• "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning." It also carries the paragraph of the Declaration of the Rights of Man about the right to emigrate.

One issue so far

Exodus too is strictly factual; it contains collective letters of Soviet Jews addressed to the authorities, statements by individual Jews, and extracts from Soviet laws regarding travel to the West. All letters are signed and give the profession and the full address of the writer.

The editors plan to issue another periodical which is to be a forum of discussion.

So far only one issue of Exodus, and that one undated, has appeared.

In the vast field of Soviet underground literature there are other periodicals. The first of these, mainly literary, appeared in the 1950's. One of the more famous ones was the revue Phoenix published by Yuri Galanskov and others.

Small illegal periodicals in the form of news sheets are published from time to time in certain schools and institutes, but there is little reliable information about them.

All we know from many witnesses is that "samizdat" gets around and that quite a few Soviet intellectuals know about the Chronicle.

Copies of the Chronicle and of the recent Zionist publication which have reached the West consist of 20 to 30 typewritten pages on thin copy paper, 7 to 10 inches in format. Sometimes there are appendixes.

Photos copies also have come out, but since they often are made from third or fourth carbon copies they are not very clear.

The political significance of the underground literature is a moot question. The relative indifference of the regime toward it seems to indicate that the Kremlin does not believe "samizdat" to be very dangerous. But the fact that "samizdat" and its political periodicals can appear point to the split consciousness of part of the Soviet intelligentsia.

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